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To Brig. Gen. A. W. Greely.
With regards of W. H. Richardson

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Valley Forge

By

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Norristown, Pa.

Illustrated from Photographs

by the Author

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VALLEY FORGE.

Illustrated from photographs by the author.

By *W. H. Richardson.*

WHEN the name of Valley Forge is mentioned, the average American immediately associates with it the encampment of the Continental army during the terrible winter of 1777-78, when the hungry and forlorn champions of a well-nigh hopeless cause, wasted by wounds, privation and disease, were able only to "occupy a cold, bleak hill, and sleep under frost and snow, without clothes or blankets." The thousands of pilgrims who now visit that historic shrine, Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge, wander through its rooms and halls and think of the great commander-in-chief as he wrestled with problems that would have appalled ordinary men; of the malign conspiracy he had to confront and confound; of the misery and wretchedness among his suffering soldiers which he had to contemplate, the pity of which he acknowledges from his soul, but which he has no power to relieve nor prevent; and of the almost superhuman strength and courage which he there displayed in keeping alive through the long, weary months the feeble spark of a thing called the American Revolution, eventually fanning it into a flame that has burned with increasing brilliancy to our own day.

Nestling among the trees near the

point at which the Valley Creek joins the Schuylkill is the ancient pointed-stone house of miller Isaac Potts, the structure which all America cherishes to-day as the home of Washington for the half year that the army was encamped in that country. In it he faced the crises of the winter and spring with about as much to brighten and lighten his life as his men had. "Three days successively we have been destitute of bread, two days we have been entirely without meat;" "our sick naked, our well naked, our unfortunate men in captivity naked;" "the unfortunate soldiers were in want of everything; they had neither coats, hats, shirts nor shoes; their feet and legs froze till they became black, and it was often necessary to amputate them;"—these are but a few of the horrible pictures which met the view of the commander-in-chief whichever way he turned. And all this was almost within sound of the revelry of the warmly housed and well fed British soldiers in Philadelphia.

Even a casual reading of the history of the Pennsylvania campaign leading up to Valley Forge in the fall of 1777 cannot fail to impress one with the supreme optimism of the American leader. Surely it was no pleasant retrospect to look back over the



WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS AT VALLEY FORGE.

battlefields of the past four months; and yet in the orderly book there is an entry dated December 17, two days before the formal occupation of Valley Forge, in which the army is reminded that although, in some instances, there were failures, "yet upon the whole, Heaven hath smiled upon our arms and crowned them with signal success." Howe landed, it will be recalled, on August 25, at the head of Chesapeake Bay, with 18,000 men and a determination to take the rebel capital. The first serious collision of the hostile armies occurred at Chad's Ford, on September 11. A bit of carelessness in scouting and a piece of blundering reporting changed the fortunes of the day from what would have been a victory into a retreat. More than one thousand men were subtracted from the fighting force of the patriots, and Howe occupied the American camps on the night of the battle of Brandywine. Yet Washington took occasion to report to the President of Congress that "the troops were in good spirits." Nine days later a division under General

Wayne was attacked by General Grey, and what is popularly, but altogether inappropriately, termed the Paoli massacre, with its 150 casualties, was the result.

Then came the battle of Germantown, on October 4. How much the bitterness of that defeat must have been emphasized at the time may be gathered from one of those pretty letters General Wayne used to write to his "Dear Polly." The action, in his judgment, would have put an end to the war, had not the smoke and confusion prevented the following up of a victory actually won at one phase of the operation. "The commander-in-chief returns his thanks to the general and other officers and men concerned in the attack," and sees, notwithstanding the disaster, "that the enemy is not proof against a vigorous attack, and may be put to flight when boldly pursued." Germantown had cost nearly 1,200 of the 8,000 men engaged; and the weary, wretched and ragged soldiers—for troubles with the commissary had now started—sat down that night on the old camp-

ground at Pennypacker's Mills to catch their breath, while the officers began to plan for another set-to with a victorious but vulnerable antagonist.

On September 26 the British advance had entered and taken possession of Philadelphia; and safe within that hospitable city they successfully resisted all attempts to lure them out or dislodge them. For nearly six weeks, from November 2 to December 11, the Americans were strongly intrenched at Whitemarsh, thirteen

miles northwest of the city. Their gradually weakening line was too thin, however, to give battle to the British, and too near Philadelphia to feel absolutely safe from attack; so it was decided to move to a more advantageous location, from which the invaders could at least be watched and kept in check. The story of

the march to Valley Forge is another chapter in the epic of that frightful winter. Various participants have contributed their testimony about the dismal conditions under which the journey was prosecuted. A Pennsylvania lieutenant notes in his diary that they started to cross the Schuylkill at Swede's Ford, not over 800 feet wide at that point, at six o'clock in the evening of December 12, and that it was three o'clock the next morning before they reached camp at Gulf Mill, two miles further along, "where we remained without tents or

blankets in the midst of a severe snow-storm." A Connecticut warrior portrays his misery at the same place in this suggestive style: "We are ordered to march over the river. It snows—I'm sick—eat nothing—no whiskey—no baggage—Lord—Lord—Lord—till sunrise crossing the river—cold and uncomfortable." After the army had been four days in camp, the tents came and were pitched for the first time, "to keep the men more comfortable." How appropriate, then, the day of thanksgiving and prayer

that Congress had ordered for the eighteenth!

When the army arrived at Valley Forge on the nineteenth, the campaign for the year had practically closed; General Howe had taken Philadelphia—or, as Franklin put it, Philadelphia had taken General Howe; the Americans were huddled around their camp fires



DOORWAY, WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS.

twenty-two miles away, freezing, starving, wasting from disease; but still the characteristic cheerfulness of Washington shines forth; he remembers that a French ship has arrived at Portsmouth with a large quantity of munitions of war, and he extends his congratulations to the army upon the auspicious event.

But the saddest feature of the months of suffering that followed was the fact that most of it was unnecessary. Then, as now, members of Congress had their favorites, and men were selected for the commissariat

without regard for their fitness,—incompetents, whose especial claim to fame to-day rests upon their having furnished a Revolutionary ancestry for the familiar stories of the bungling commissary in our late unpleasantness with Spain. We are told that, at the very time the barefooted Continentals were making bloody tracks in the snow on the bleak hills of Valley Forge, there were hogsheads of shoes—somewhere else. In answer to General Wayne's fervid appeal for clothing for his frost-bitten soldiers came the reply—which might be counted almost humorous but for the ghastly picture of his men clutching shreds of old blankets over their nakedness—that the delay in furnishing it was "due to the want of buttons."

Fortunately there is something else than tragedy to be read in the records of those days. The old orderly books, for example, tell us a great deal that has a different sort of flavor. Here is an account of a court martial held to consider the case of a Virginia captain who was charged with having been "so far Ellivated with liquor when on the parade for Exercising as rendered him imCapable in doing his duty with precession." Luckily the good captain was able to prove an alibi, or that something else was responsible for his "Ellivation,"—for his acquittal is duly noted.

Then there was a Pennsylvania lieutenant tried for "unofficer and ungentlemanlike behavior in taking 2 mares and a barrel of carpenter's tools on the line, which mares he conveyed away, and sold the tools at private sale." The chronicler does not give a detailed account of the testimony; but it is written that the court found that while the lieutenant was "guilty of the facts alledged" in the charge, yet they did not amount to "unofficer and ungentlemanlike behavior, and so acquit him of it." There is something

so delightfully vague about the verdict that we are led to wonder how far an officer and gentleman at Valley Forge might have gone in the business of picking up and disposing of stray mares and barrels of carpenter's tools before crossing the borders of propriety.



RIVER ROAD.

The village of Valley Forge lies in the hollow at the right.

It was while the army was at Valley Forge, too, that sweeping reforms in its organization were inaugurated. Early in the spring, Frederick William Augustus, Baron von Steuben, arrived there, and started upon his duties as inspector-general. "The arms at Valley Forge," he wrote, "were in a horrible condition, covered with rust, half of them without bayonets, many from which a single shot could not be fired. The pouches were quite as bad as the arms. A great many of the men had tin boxes instead of pouches; others had cow-



LOOKING SOUTH FROM THE FORTIFIED HILL SHOWING MOUNT JOY.

General Huntington's Connecticut troops occupied the land shown in the foreground of the picture; General Conway's Pennsylvania and General Maxwell's New Jersey troops, the middle distance at the left.

horns; and muskets, carbines, fowling-pieces and rifles were to be seen in the same company. The description of the dress is most easily given. The men were literally naked, some of them in the fullest extent of the word. The officers who had coats had them of every color and make. I saw officers at a grand parade at Valley Forge mounting guard in a sort of dressing-gown, made of an old blanket or a woollen bed-cover. With regard to their military discipline, I

may safely say no such thing existed."

Von Steuben, from all accounts, was a man who would rather fight and work than eat or sleep; and so, perhaps, it is not surprising that he fashioned so wonderful a weapon from the woefully raw and rough material he had to deal with. Rising at three o'clock in the morning, he would be on the parade at sunrise, take a musket in his own hands, and show the picked squad just how the thing was



EAST FROM FORT HUNTINGTON.



GENERAL WAYNE'S HEADQUARTERS.

to be done. In a few weeks of that sort of personal effort he had the whole camp fired with his own enthusiasm, so that the men with whom he began were able to execute the most difficult movements with the greatest precision. The petty jealousies, the sectional feeling, of the various contingents were forgotten, and all seemed to be animated by a nobler rivalry that boded a different outlook for the cause. A little later we see that regenerated army not only sturdy enough to withstand the fiercest onslaughts of British guards and grenadiers, but capable also to beat them at their own favorite business of the bayonet charge.

The house in which Baron von Steuben lived while at Valley Forge is still standing. A mile or so southeast of it is the house that was the military home of General Wayne, the dashing officer who made

much of the honest work done by the Prussian drill-master. It was the bravery and discipline of the troops under "Mad Anthony" at Monmouth which gave lustre to the American arms and set him in the hearts of his countrymen as a "modern Leonidas."

In striking contrast with the sombre coloring which the name of Valley Forge suggests was the brilliant sortie of a party of 2,500 men under La Fayette, on May 18, 1778. For the general purpose of gathering information about the British, the

youthful Frenchman was directed to proceed toward the hostile lines at Philadelphia. Early on the morning of that day his command arrived at Barren Hill, on the east side of the Schuylkill, some eight or nine miles from the city. From that point the wings were extended to cover other highways, and scouting parties sent into Philadelphia, one of them giving the revellers at the Mischianza a terrible scare. Another object of the demonstration was to develop the strength of the enemy; and in this it



HEADQUARTERS OF GENERALS STEUBEN AND DUPORTAIL.

was highly successful, for an overwhelming force set out from Philadelphia to surround the American division and carry La Fayette back to the city, where a dinner party awaited his coming. The details of the operations around Barren Hill church and its ancient burying-ground, the failure of the carefully laid plans of the British, the withdrawal of the American command from an exceedingly perilous position to a safe place on the opposite side of the Schuylkill, combine to make one of the most spirited chapters in the narrative of Valley Forge.

Of course it should not be forgotten that the news of the French alliance reached the army at Valley Forge; and from that glad first of May, when Washington announced it, the local literature seems to have taken on a sprightliness it did not possess before. The orderly book from that time fairly rings with directions for grand parades, general rejoicings, manœuvres before members of the "grand" congress; and divine services are not forgotten. There are councils of war and speculations as to the probable course of the evidently uncomfortable enemy. As early as May 23 it was known that the evacuation of Philadelphia had been decided upon. Soon the news came that transports in the Delaware were being loaded with baggage and stores. Then the rumors of the coming of D'Estaing's fleet decided for the British that the walking to New York would probably be safer than the sailing. On the eighteenth of June the first divisions of the Continental army left Valley Forge and occupied Philadelphia, taking possession of the city only a few hours after its former guests were gone. The

next day the mass of the army—no longer the disorganized conglomeration of colonial troops, but a thoroughly welded, homogeneous American army—was making all possible haste after the retiring Sir Henry Clinton, his 17,000 troops and twelve mile supply train.

From a military point of view the selection of Valley Forge for the encampment was a most admirable one. Two of its boundaries, the west and north, were deep streams, whose passages were easily defended, while the approaches from the east and south were absolutely dominated by the heights which rose in the angle of these water courses. A brief description of the topography of the country



GENERAL KNOW'S HEADQUARTERS.

will put the reader more closely in touch with the subject.

Imagine the Valley Creek flowing due north between precipitous hills for nearly a mile before it reaches the Schuylkill River. Mount Joy, the highest summit on the east bank, is fully a mile from the river, and it lifts its wooded crest 426 feet above the sea level. A little further to the north is another hill, which is really a sort of spur of Mount Joy, 350 feet high; while still further off to the northeast is a third hill, with its summit something more than 100 feet below that of Mount Joy. On the eastern descent of these hills the citizens of that long departed community have left the indelible record of their occupation. Mount Joy and her two sisters are still the proud wearers of their grass-grown chaplets, lines of



THE INTRENCHMENTS NEAR
THE RIVER ROAD.

earthworks, 1,600 feet, 300 feet and 1,300 feet long, thrown up near the crests of the three by the toilers in the youth of our nation. Below these works are still to be seen Fort Huntington, protecting the north end of the lines and dominating the River road, a highway paralleling the Schuylkill all the way into Philadelphia, and the deeper and better preserved Fort Washington at the south end of the lines on Mount Joy commanding the approach from the south and west.

Further down, the hills break gently into an undulating landscape, upon which most of the brigades were encamped. At the south end of Mount Joy, beyond Fort Washington, were General Woodford's Virginia troops. North of Fort Washington, and on the same hill, were General Maxwell's New Jerseymen and General Knox's artillery. In the cove or hollow in front of the shoulder of Mount Joy were the Pennsylvania troops commanded by General Conway—the same Conway who is remembered in history solely for his connection with the infamous cabal against Washington. Then, next the River road, near

to the fort which bears his name, General Jedediah Huntington's Connecticut troops were encamped.

Still further down the slope and lying back of the outer line of intrenchments—now entirely disappeared—beginning at the south and running in a curved line to the northeast, were the encampments of General Scott's Virginians, General Wayne's First and Second Pennsylvanians, General Poor's New Yorkers, General Glover's Massachusetts troops, General



Learned's New Hampshire men, General Patterson's Vermonters, General Weedon's Virginians, and General Muhlenberg with his Pennsylvanians and Virginians on the extreme left. The locations of these thirteen brigades can be better comprehended by imagining a pair of gigantic compasses extended to sixty degrees, with the head to the south. One leg laid to the north along the three hills would roughly cover the inner line of four brigades first mentioned; the other leg extended to the northeast would cover the outer line of nine brigades last named. Upon the River road, upon which the points would rest, were General Varnum's Rhode Islanders and a battery known as Fort Platt or

the Star redoubt. A well defined knoll in a field about two hundred yards east of the building in which General Varnum had his headquarters marks the site of this fortification, which was built to command the approach to Sullivan's bridge. This was a temporary structure thrown across the Schuylkill about a quarter of a mile northeast of the fort.

The sites of the huts occupied by some of the officers can also be readily traced in the thicket about a quarter of a mile east of the star redoubt. When these structures were erected the earth was banked up around the logs as an additional protection from the biting cold, and in the remains to-day the regularity of the plan of this diminutive village is quite apparent. Just across the River road at this point the ground slopes sharply to the south. Close to the foot of the declivity is a large sycamore standing alone. Near it is the grave of John Waterman, one of the many heroes from Rhode Island who never went home from the war. A substantial wire cage now entirely covers the grave—not for the purpose of keeping John Waterman in, as some irreverent visitor has remarked, but for keeping vandals out. It is rather difficult to understand how relic hunters who came before the cage ever managed to leave as much as they did of this lonely monument.

The location of the various brigades, etc., as just given, is based upon the investigations of Jared Sparks, who, in illustrating the letters of Washington in the early part of this century, had a map prepared under the auspices of John Armstrong, then secretary of war. An old man named Davis gave his recollection of the various dispositions of the different encamp-

ments, and his information helped to plot the map. It is a curious fact that no contemporary map of the whole camp was known to be in existence until 1897, when that indefatigable antiquarian, Hon. S. W. Pennypacker, secured from Amsterdam a set of original drafts and plans of the Revolutionary period, drawn by a French engineer with the army. Among them was a priceless map of Valley Forge. This map exhibits slight deviations from the arrangement already quoted, and has less detail; but apart from its inestimable value as a unique historical document, it tells what was not known before, that Lord Stirling's brigade of Carolina troops was encamped on the west bank of Valley Creek, opposite general headquarters, at the spot that has hitherto been allotted to the artificers; and further it reveals the fact that Washington's headquarters before he occupied the Potts house were not, as has been alleged, in a marquise, but in a house some distance southeast of Valley Forge.

Valley Forge takes its name from an iron-working plant established there many years before the militant Americans made it famous. The musty records of the past tell us that



INTERIOR OF FORT HUNTINGTON.



LAFAYETTE'S HEADQUARTERS.

in 1757 one John Potts purchased property which included what was then known as Mount Joyforge. This stood on the banks of Valley Creek, the fall of that stream as it passed on down to the Schuylkill through the narrow gorge between the high hills on either hand furnishing an abundance of power. The business of Mount Joy forge—or the Valley forge, as it soon came to be known locally—was a very flourishing one: a great many men and teams were employed in making and marketing its products. Ironmaster John Potts saw that a flour mill which could furnish feed for the horses and flour for the drivers would be a profitable adjunct to the older industry on the creek; and in 1758 this was built—and it lasted until 1843, when it was destroyed by fire; later it was rebuilt a little further up the stream, almost opposite the present headquarters building, and after serving as a paper

mill for many years it was finally dismantled and is now falling into decay.

About the same year that John Potts built the flour mill the famous mansion was also erected. In 1768 both the mill and house came into the possession of his son Isaac, and the forge went to another son, Joseph. One of the earliest historical references to this mill appears in a letter from Richard Peters, secretary of war, to Thomas Wharton, president of the Executive Council of Pennsylvania. He wrote on August 30, 1777, about "a large quantity of flour spoiling for want of baking; it lies at Valley Forge." If Isaac Potts had been a modern advertiser, he would doubtless have claimed that it was the taste of that flour of his which later secured for him the exclusive trade of a great



LAFAYETTE'S HEADQUARTERS FROM THE REAR.

galaxy of public men and the entire American army for six months. That illustrious housekeeper, Martha Washington, must have eaten bread, perhaps prepared by her own hands, made from this same flour of Isaac Potts's mill. How could a miller ever let such an opportunity for getting a testimonial about it from so preëminent an authority as the General's wife slip by him!

While dealing with Isaac Potts it



GENERAL MUHLENBERG'S HEADQUARTERS.

will be proper to refer to an incident in which he is involved and which has been repeatedly embalmed in verse and gayly colored lithographs. Everybody has heard how Washington was discovered at prayer in the woods above the headquarters, pleading with the Almighty for guidance through the troublous times which then beset his country. The discovery is said to have been made by "a good old Quaker," sometimes referred to as a blacksmith; but a manuscript in the hand of his daughter informs us that the "good old Quaker" who viewed the remarkable spectacle was twenty-seven-year-old Isaac Potts. After the death of Washington he pronounced an eulogy on his character in Friends' meeting, that was a masterly production, a member of Congress declaring that he would not go to hear "Light Horse Harry" Lee's address in the Lutheran Church in Philadelphia because he had just heard "a much better one than he will deliver, from an old Quaker."

A few years since the headquarters building was

restored to its condition of nearly a century and a quarter ago. "The General's apartments is very small," wrote Mrs. Washington from there; "he has had a log cabin built to dine in, which has made our quarters much more tolerable than they were at first." The log dining-room has been rebuilt, and the whole house, with its sacred memories, has been given over to the perpetuation of "the times which tried men's souls." A subterranean passageway which once led to the

river's edge has been freshly vaulted for a long distance; one room of the house is adorned with a chronological portraiture of Washington; others contain many interesting pictures, pieces of furniture and other relics of the Colonial and Revolutionary eras. Externally the substantial and comfortable look about the building is very impressive, its simple yet dignified proportions appealing at once to the good taste of every visitor. The curious porch over the front door, the exquisite hand-made moulding and other de-



HEADQUARTERS OF GENERALS VARNUM AND DE KALB.

tails of its architecture are of a character seldom seen in any structure of this generation. The house and grounds are now owned and cared for by the Centennial and Memorial Association of Valley Forge.

It is to the credit of the state of Pennsylvania that she has done even a little in the way of acquiring ownership in this hallowed ground. So far



VALLEY CREEK.

the sum of \$35,000 has been spent by the Commonwealth, and about 250 acres of land, embracing the inner line of breastworks and the two principal fortifications, purchased. Nature has been more generous than the state in preserving the grounds for the free enjoyment of all generations, in that she has admirably provided against their obliteration by putting forth a fine growth of trees. On May 30, 1893, the Valley Forge Commission was created by act of Legislature, and the committee of public spirited gentlemen who formed it went actively to work, with the result stated. In their last report to the governor they recommended the opening up of an avenue which would give access to the site of the nine brigade encampments along the outer line of intrenchments, besides the laying out of such roads or paths as would put the existing relics of Valley Forge within easy reach of tourists. The cost would be \$50,000; but the com-

mittee is now without funds, and Pennsylvania has not yet seen fit to spend so much additional money in that sort of patriotism. There should be no question as to the value to be received from such an investment. Americanism as a principle would be more deeply felt and better taught; the spirit of nationality which was born at Valley Forge would be more forcibly impressed upon the mind of every visitor, and the whole country would be the gainer. When some disposition is displayed by Pennsylvania that looks like real interest in caring for these things, it is likely that other states whose sons suffered in those terrible days would be proud to erect memorials to them. It has been suggested as not outside the range of probabilities that the national government would erect a great monumental tower on the summit of Mount Joy, from which the whole plan of the encampment could be comprehended. Local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution are now working actively in the matter of interesting the coming session of the Pennsylvania Legislature in further condemnation of property; and it is to be hoped that the state will manifest her belief in historic shrines as a valuable asset in the Commonwealth.

Another phase of popular interest in Valley Forge has been developed by the movement, recently inaugurated, to make the place a government reservation. At a meeting held under the auspices of the Valley Forge National Park Association in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on December 19th last, the project, which has the hearty approval of President McKinley, was given considerable impetus. A bill has already been introduced into Congress, providing for an appropriation to purchase the desired property and then maintain it under the jurisdiction of the War Department.



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